

A photograph of a man in a white shirt baptizing a woman in a body of water. The man is leaning over the woman, who is partially submerged. The water is greenish-brown. The title 'The Great Commission' is written in white, italicized font across the top of the image.

The Great Commission

Fulfilled in Acts of the Apostles

Notes and Commentary by Jim Wilsford

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction and Matt 28:19-20 _____	1
2. The Great Commission: Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24:4-48 _____	4
3. Conversions on the Day of Pentecost – Acts 2 _____	8
4. Conversions upon the Healing of the Crippled Man – Acts 3 _____	11
5. Non-Conversions at Stephen’s Sermon--Acts 7 _____	14
6. Conversion of the Samaritans – Acts 8 _____	17
7 Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch – Acts 8 _____	20
8. The Conversion of Saul – Acts 9:1-25 _____	23
9. Conversion of Cornelius – Acts 10 & 11 _____	26
10. Conversions of Lydia and the Philippian Jailor – Acts 16 _____	30
11. Conversion of the Athenians – Acts 17 _____	34
12. Conversions of Apollos and Those at Ephesus – Acts 18, 19 _____	39
13. Non-Conversions of Elymas, Felix, and Agrippa – Acts 13, 24, 26 _____	42

Cover photo from Joshua Aidoo, gospel preacher in Takoradi-W/R, Ghana

1. Introduction and Matt 28:19-20

These lessons take up the accounts of the Lord's commission, study the elements of the commission, and follow the apostles and preachers through Acts of the Apostles in order to see the fulfillment of what the Lord commanded.

Eph 1:3-14—a scripture that concisely tells what God had in mind for us in Christ from the very beginning—introduces these lessons. The examples in Acts of the conversions follow exactly what was pre-determined before time by God and commanded in the great commission by the Lord:

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment — to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

Lessons from the Examples of the Great Commission and the Conversions

Introduction and Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-48

Conversions of the Day of Pentecost—Acts 2

Conversions upon the Healing of the Crippled Man—Acts 3

Non-Conversions at Stephen's Sermon--Acts 7

Conversion of the Samaritans—Acts 8

Conversion of the Ethiopian—Acts 8

Conversion of Saul—Acts 9, 22, 24

Conversion of Cornelius—Acts 10, 11

Conversions of Lydia and the Jailer—Acts 16

Conversion of the Athenians—Acts 17

Conversions of Apollos and Those at Ephesus—Acts 18, 19

Non-Conversions of Elymus, Felix, and Agrippa—Acts 13, 24, 26

The Great Commission

Before ascending to heaven, the Lord commissioned his apostles to go unto the entire world and preach the gospel. Over time, this commission has taken the name *great commission*. Three of the gospels contain accounts of what the Lord said. Each one differs in content but not purpose. As with all the scriptures, students must take into account everything that the scriptures say. Indeed, it is likely that the Lord spoke many more words on this important subject. As this lesson proceeds through each account, it will identify and define all the components of the Lord's commission. Matt 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16; and Luke 24:46-48 record the words of the commission to the apostles. The definitions of the elements of the commission will come from the scriptures themselves—defining, as it were, Bible words with Bible thoughts, as expressed by the apostles and prophets. Each of the following lessons will trace the fulfillment of the Lord's commission in the preaching of the apostles and the obedience of the hearers.

Matt 28:19-20

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In Matthew's account of the great commission, the Lord focused on how the apostles were to make disciples. The primary action word here and in all the accounts is *go*. The end in mind was to make *disciples*. The example of how the early Christians spread the gospel is the best way to define *going*. Acts 2:14 tells of Peter preaching the first gospel sermon: "14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.'"

The Christians responded similarly, in Acts 8:4, after the stoning of Stephen: "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."

The present participial phrases *baptizing them* and *teaching them* tell how the making of disciples was to occur. In Acts 2, after Peter's sermon, Luke describes what the people did. First, in Acts 2:41, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." Second, in Acts 2:47: "Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Teaching was always to be the methodology used to make disciples and save their souls. The Old Testament (Isa 54:13) taught that Christians would be taught of God. Jesus reiterated this teaching in John 6:44-46:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: "They will all be taught by God." Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me.

Teaching and preaching was the only method for making disciples. Baptism was the only culminating act of recipients in becoming disciples. The hearers of Peter's first sermon show this process, which the Lord commanded, in action. In Acts 2:41, Luke recorded, "Those who **accepted his message were baptized**, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." Luke further describes these converts: "Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who **were being saved** [Emphasis added]." Acts 2:47.

Conclusion

In Matthew's account of the Lord's commission, the apostles were to go to all nations, and teach them to observe all things that the Lord had commanded. The hearers of this word were to be baptized. The result was that they were made disciples, and that the Lord would be with them always, even to the end of the world.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Where are the three examples of the great commission found in the New Testament?

2. How were people to be made disciples according to Matthew's account of the great commission? _____
3. To whom were the disciples to preach? _____
4. Whom did the Lord add to their number? _____

2. The Great Commission: Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24:4-48

The previous lesson studied the great commission as recorded by Matthew in Matt 28:18-20:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In Acts 2, the apostles made disciples in this very way commanded by the Lord. However, Mark 18:15-16 and in Luke 24:46-48 record the great commission. Since the Lord said all these words, the must all be studied to understand his entire teaching.

The Great Commission Recorded by Mark

Mark 16:15-16

15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

In Mark's account, the Lord is focusing on what the apostles are to do: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation;" and what the hearers are to do: "16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." The result is that they will be saved. *All the world* and *all creation* in Mark and *all nations* in Matthew 28:18-20 make the great commission applicable to every person who is to ever live. Listening to the sermon in Acts 2:5 were people from the entire world: "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." Paul preached the scope of the Lord's commission in Titus 2:11, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men."

The Lord specifies the method and the message. The method, preaching, and teaching in Matthew's account are synonymous (words meaning the same but with a different slant). *Preach* focuses on the one speaking the message and means *to proclaim or to publish abroad*. Teaching focuses on speaking the message and means *to instruct*. The Lord and the New Testament writers specify the certainty of the method as one ordained of God (see above comments on John 6:44-46). Paul wrote of this certainty and necessity in Rom 10:14-15:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Paul further endorsed God's method for spreading the gospel in 1 Cor 1:21-22, "It was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." ASV.

The Lord's message is the gospel. In Matthew's account, the Lord had said, "Teaching them all things that I have commanded you." Here he describes the message as the *good news*. Other versions say, *gospel*. The *good news* as the *gospel* becomes the word to designate the message. Paul defined the gospel in 1 Cor 15:1-7:

15:1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, . . . 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our

sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

The gospel saves; the gospel is the word preached; the gospel is the death, burial, resurrection, and appearance of Christ—all of these define the gospel clearly and permanently. Paul added in Rom 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” To change the gospel is destroy its power. If either an angel or man changes the gospel, their fate is eternal condemnation (Gal 1:6-9).

In Mark’s account, the Lord states clearly, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” The Lord requires belief and baptism for salvation. All three—belief, baptism, and salvation—are clearly defined. *Believes* and its variants—*faith, believe, and belief*—are nouns and verbs coming from the same root word. The Hebrew writer gave specificity to the words in Heb 11:1-2, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The necessity of belief in conversion cannot be doubted, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Heb 11:5. John 3:16 tells what we must believe, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Paul explains how one comes to believe in Rom 10:13-14:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Baptism is an element of the great commission here in Mark’s account and above in Matthew’s account. In addition to definitions given by Paul, there is illustrative evidence of the method used to baptize in the New Testament. When John baptized Jesus, John clearly immersed the Lord in Matt 3:16: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water.” Philip likewise immersed the eunuch in Acts 8:38-39: “Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water.” In addition to these clear examples Paul described the act of baptism as a burial in Col 2:12: “Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” To fulfill the Lord’s teaching in his commission, we must baptize by immersion and in water. This study will show that the converts in Acts followed this teaching exactly.

In this account of the Lord’s commission, the end of belief and baptism was salvation. Matthew’s account and its fulfillment show that the saved became disciples and the saved were added to the church daily (Matt 28: 19-20; Act 2:41; Acts 2:47). Salvation and the saved are in Christ according to Peter in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” The method that the Lord commanded in his commission and the purpose combine in Paul’s teaching in Rom 6:3-7:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Peter also combined salvation and baptism in 1 Peter 3:21-22:

21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him.

Mark's account of the Lord's commission concludes with a description on the worst sort of punishment for those who do not believe on him and his word: "Whoever does not believe will be condemned." Belief in this account of the commission goes hand in hand with obedience:

Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him. Rom 16:25-26.

Peter also concurred that the end of the commission was eternal salvation in 2 Peter 1:10-11, "For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." In Mark's account, the Lord, himself, brings us to an emphatic *either/or* as regards our own salvation.

The Great Commission as Recorded by Luke

Luke 24:46-48

"This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things."

Luke records the commission with an emphasis on the progressive and continuous nature of what the Lord expects to happen. The gospel message of good news is presented in the same terms that we have seen Paul use in 1 Cor 15:1-4 above. The death, burial, and resurrection are explicit in "the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead." In Luke's account, the action required of the believer, repentance, and the results of that action, forgiveness of sins, are vital parts of the gospel message that the Lord expected the apostles to preach.

This analysis has already covered definitions of *gospel*, *preached* and *all nations*. The new elements added by the Lord in Luke's account are *repentance* and *remission of sins*. Peter combined these same two elements of the commission in the command that he gave those who cried out and asked what to do. In Acts 2:38, Luke recorded, "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

Even before the Lord gave his commission, he preached the importance of repentance. He said in Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." In Acts 5:29-32, Peter once again combined repentance and the forgiveness of sins:

"We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Paul defined repentance and how it occurs in 2 Cor 7:8-10:

9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led

you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Just being sorry is not enough to save one. The sorrow must be Godly sorrow that is the sorrow leading to repentance, and repentance leading to salvation. Peter spoke of this same kind of repentance in Acts 3:19-20 when he preached:

“Repent , then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.”

Thus true repentance starts with Godly sorrow and a commitment to leave sin and follow the Lord, and ends with actually turning to God by doing what the Lord commands—no exceptions. This true repentance leads to salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Paul agreed with Peter Acts 17:29-31:

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent . 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

The last element of the Lord’s commission in Luke’s account is *forgiveness of sins*. Forgiveness of sins is central to the eternal purpose of God. In addition to its inclusion as an element of the Lord’s commission, the Lord related the forgiveness of sins to the blood of the New Covenant in Matt 26:27-29:

“Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins . 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”

Peter included the forgiveness of sins as the result of obeying the gospel in Acts 2:38, Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Paul related the forgiveness of sins as the reward for winning the great struggle to save us from darkness and power of Satan in Acts 26:17-18:

“17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Conclusion

The Lord’s commission tells fully what the Lord expected of the apostles and of those who hear the word. The apostles were to go and preach or teach the gospel to the whole creation. The hearers were to believe, repent, and be baptized. The immediate results were that the hearers became disciples and the Lord was with them always, even to the end of the world. The eternal results were the forgiveness of sins and salvation. This study will show that the apostles and the hearers did just what the Lord asked them to do.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. What were the apostles to preach? To whom were they to preach it? _____
2. What were the people to do to respond to the gospel? _____

3. Conversions on the Day of Pentecost—Acts 2

The previous two lessons studied the Great Commission as presented by the Lord and recorded in Matt 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-48. When we summarized the three accounts, we found that the complete teaching of the Lord required the apostles to teach and preach the gospel, which included all things that he had commanded. They were to preach to all nations, even the whole creation, beginning at Jerusalem. The hearers of the gospel, thus taught, were to believe and be baptized. As a result, the obedient believers had their sins forgiven, were saved, and were made disciples. The Lord was with them always, even to the very end of the age. The objective of this, and succeeding lessons, is to study the examples of conversion in Acts of the Apostles in order to see the faithful fulfillment of these commands of the Lord.

Peter and the Apostles Preached on the Day of Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost after the death of the Lord, the apostles came together and the Holy Spirit ascended upon them, empowering them to speak so that each hearer heard “them in his own native language?” Acts 2:8. The description that follows is one of a man fervently preaching to those gathered together. Acts 2:14 records, “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” After Peter finished the recorded sermon, he continued, “With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Acts 2:40. The method, used on that day of Pentecost, was preaching, just as the Lord had commanded.

The Preaching Was to All Nations

The Lord had commanded that the apostles preach to all nations, the whole creation. In Acts 2, the apostles did just that. Acts 2:5 tells, “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.” Those gathered to hear Peter described themselves as coming from all over the world in Acts 2:8-12:

“Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome 11(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

In Acts 2:39, Peter extended the scope of the preaching to all men, even the gentiles, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Peter quoted Joel, who had forecast the scope of the gospel call, in Acts 2:21, “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Sectarianism, by definition, subdivides the universal call of the Lord—all nations, the whole creation, all those far off, making it the single requirement for an individuals salvation. Peter and the apostles did exactly what the Lord had commanded.

The Apostles Preached the Gospel

The Lord commanded that the gospel be the message preached, and the apostles preached only that message. That gospel remains the only message that is the power of God unto salvation. Rom 1:16. 1 Cor 15:1-5 defined the gospel:

I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I

received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

In Peter's sermon, he proceeded immediately to lay out these facts of the gospel, including the empirical evidence of his resurrection (He was seen.). Acts 2:23 speaks directly of the **death** of Christ: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Peter quoted David in Acts 2:27 to illustrate how that Christ **was buried** but that the grave could not hold him, "Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Peter concluded the facts of the gospel with the **resurrection**, "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." Acts 2:24. In Acts 2:31-32, Peter summarized the gospel that he preached and added that they were all **eyewitnesses**, "Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact."

Those Who Heard the Gospel Believed

Peter concluded his preaching with an appeal for them to accept the gospel. In Acts 2:36, he said, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." *To know assuredly* is the essence of *belief*, fulfilling the Lord's command in Mark 16:16 that said, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." Heb 11:1-2 defines faith as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Their assurance ran so deep that they were convicted in their hearts. The response of those who heard was immediate and emphatic as they obeyed the command of the Lord to believe. "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" Acts 2:37. Peter preached belief, and they obeyed the Lord by believing and crying out, "What shall we do?"

Peter Preached Repentance and Baptism and the Hearers Repented and Were Baptized

Acts 2:38-39 records Peter answering those believing people, cut to the heart, telling them just what to do: "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'" Their response to the gospel call was just as direct as Peter's message, as recorded in Acts 2:41. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." These believing, penitent people were baptized, just as the Lord had commissioned that they should be.

They Received the Forgiveness of Sins, Were Saved, and Were Made Disciples.

The combined result of Peter's preaching and of the people's obeying patterned exactly the commands of the Lord in his commission. Peter said in Acts 2:38 that they should repent and be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Luke recorded Jesus saying that remission of sins should be preached, and it was. Mark had recorded him saying that those who believed and were baptized would be saved. Acts 2:47 tells us, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." The Lord said that they

would be saved, Peter preached that they would be saved and they were. Matthew recorded the Lord commanding, "Make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey all things that I have commanded." That the conversions in Acts 2 made them obedient disciples is clear. Acts 2:42-43 tells us:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Conclusion

In Acts 2, the apostles preached, and the people obeyed, exactly what the Lord had commanded in all three of the accounts of the Great Commission. If preachers of today preach what the Lord said preach, and if the people obey what the Lord commanded, the outcome will be certain salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Jesus sealed the fate of those who do not believe and do not obey his word in Mark 16:16, "Whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Review Matt 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-48. What are the elements of the Lord's commission? _____-
2. What are the verses in Acts 2 that show the fulfillment of each of these elements?

3. What benefits did the penitent believers receive when they obeyed by being baptized?

4. How is one added to the number of those who believed (the church)? _____

4. Conversions upon the Healing of the Crippled Man—Acts 3

This study has established that the great commission included commands to go preach the gospel to the whole creation, teaching them to observe all things that the Lord had commanded. The hearers of this good news were to believe, repent, and be baptized. The Lord promised penitent, obedient, believers that he would save them, remit their sins, make them disciples, be with them to the very end of the age, and give them certain signs to accompany them. Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16: 15-18; and Luke 26:46-47. The conversion of the crippled beggar in Acts 3 illustrates how the apostles fulfilled this commission of the Lord.

All Nations Includes the Poor and the Crippled

When Peter and John went up to temple at the time of prayer, they met a crippled beggar: “One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer — at three in the afternoon. 2 Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.” Acts 3:1-2. In verses 3-5, the beggar asked for money. The apostles’ effort with this man illustrates the all-inclusive nature of the phrase, *all nations*. The great commission is for all, no matter how rich or poor, healthy or ill. As this study continues through Acts of the Apostles, each new conversion will illustrate this all-inclusive nature of the gospel. We sing the song: *The Gospel Is for All*.

Peter and John Had More to Give Than Money

When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money: “Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’ 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.” The beggar was clearly looking for money. Instead of giving him money, which Peter said that he did not have, Peter command him to walk:

6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Acts 3:6-8.

In verses 9-10, the people recognized him, and they, as the crippled man, were amazed. Luke described them: “And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.” And, “While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.” Verse 11.

The crippled beggar and the people, who were amazed, missed the point. The money, had they had any, was not important, nor was the fact that he could walk, though wonderful in its demonstration of God’s power. Peter uses their wonder and amazement to focus on the gospel and salvation. However, the miracle confirmed the apostles’ word as the actual word of the Lord. The Lord had promised signs to accompany them in Mark 16:17-18:

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

In Acts 2, the apostles had spoken so that every one heard in their own language (tongue). Now they demonstrate the power of the Lord that accompanied them in healing this crippled

beggar. The purpose of all such signs was to confirm the word preached as the word of the Lord. In Heb 2:3-4, the Hebrew writer explained:

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The miracles were never to accommodate the recipients.

The Gospel Peter Preached Was the True Power

The true power was not silver and gold nor was it the restoration of the man's crippled legs, no matter how wondrous an event. The true power on this occasion was the power of the gospel. Peter was quick to give God the glory for the miraculous event in verse 12 beginning: "When Peter saw this, he said to them: 'Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus.'" He then moved directly to preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He said, "You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead." Acts 3:13-15. Peter also added that they were witnesses of this – the final fact of the gospel.

Peter spoke of the faith, which made this healing possible, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong." The faith of the healing was Peter's faith and not the crippled man's faith, who himself was passive in the healing act. Peter finished, "It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see." Acts 3:16. Peter's focus is off the healing and on the gospel as it fulfilled their very own prophets: "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer." Acts 3:17-18.

Peter Preached Repentance and the Wiping Out of Sins.

Peter said, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus." In the fulfillment of the great commission, Peter preached repentance and a turn to God; he preached that the result would be the wiping away of sins (*remission of sins* in Luke's account); he preached that times of refreshing may come from the Lord (*salvation* in Mark's account). Peter promises more in verses 21. The Lord will return:

He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 For Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people." 24 "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. 25 And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

In Acts 1:9-11, the apostles heard of the Lord's return, which now Peter confirms with his

teaching:

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

The result was that many heard and believed, fulfilling Mark's account, "But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand." Acts 4:4.

Conclusion

Acts 3 teaches all the elements of the Great Commission from gospel accounts except baptism, which is not mentioned specifically. It is important to understand that penitent, believers who turn to Lord will obey his every command. Some examples in our study will omit elements of the great commission. That does not mean they are unimportant. True believers will strive to do all that the Lord taught.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. What did Peter have to give the crippled man? _____
2. Why was the healing not the most important gift? _____
3. Whose faith was necessary for the miracle to happen? _____
4. What must one do to enjoy seasons of refreshing? _____

5. Non-Conversions at Stephen's Sermon--Acts 7

In Acts 7:1-8:1, Luke records a sermon by Stephen and the adverse way that the Jews received it. In the previous chapters of Acts, thousand of Jews had received the gospel and obeyed it. Stephen was one of the seven servants selected in the sixth chapter to serve the Grecian widows. From this brief, encounter with Stephen, we learned several things. A review of Acts 6 illustrated Stephens character and faithfulness. Verse 5 describes Stephen: "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Verse 8 tells us more: "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." Stephen by name was a Grecian Jew, and it was from among these Jews that his opposition came in Acts 6:8-10: "Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)-Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, 10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke." They worked secretly against him, accusing him of speaking words of blasphemy against Moses and against God. Acts 6:11. By the end of Acts 6, they had seized Stephen, falsely charged him, and brought him before the Sanhedrin, presenting false witnesses. Even before Stephen's sermon, he appeared to them as an angel, "15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

Stephen Shows the Fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets in the Death and Resurrection of Christ.

The false witnesses said, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." Acts 6:13-14. The crux of the argument against Stephen was that he allegedly spoke against the temple and the law. In the trumped up charges, they alleged that Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs handed down by Moses. In the narrative that follows, Stephen shows that the fulfillment of the law and the prophets was in Christ and that God does not live in houses made by men.

God fulfilled the law and the prophets in Christ. The first point reviews the history of the Jews from God's promise to Abraham, to Egyptian captivity, to their deliverance by the hand of God under Moses, their leader and prophet. Verses 2-36. The Jewish listeners would accept this early part of a historical argument. Their anger increased dramatically with the conclusions that Stephen drew. The first of these was that their prophet Moses had foretold the coming of the Lord: "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.' 38 He [Christ] was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him [Moses] on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us." Stephen placed Christ, the Lord, in the very midst of the happenings of their forefather with one important addition: "He received living words to pass on to us." Their fathers had rejected Christ and refused to obey him. They exchanged him for idols like the golden calf, heavenly bodies (verses 39-42), shrines to Molech, and the star of Rephan.

God does not live in houses made by men. From verses 44-47, Stephen rehearses the history from the tabernacle to the temple made by Solomon. Stephen concluded, quoting from the prophets:

48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

49 "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? 50 Has not my hand made all these things?"

From this historical narrative, Stephen brings his defense, which is in reality an accusation against the Jews, in the strongest possible terms:

51 "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.

Stephen's conclusion emphasizes the death of the Righteous One at their hands, thus placing the gospel of the great commission in context across the dispensations of the Patriarchs and the Law of Moses. Stephen also carried forward the facts of Luke's account of the great commission. Indeed, the Lord had made the same argument to the disciples that Stephen made to these Jews:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. Luke 24:25-27

The difference is that the disciples accepted the teaching; these Jews rejected it.

The Jews Responded by Rejecting the Gospel, Failing to Believe, Repent, and Be Baptized.

Rather than respond to the gospel as the Lord commanded, the Jews becomes violent in their disbelief. The Lord had said in giving his commission in Mark 16:16, "Whoever does not believe will be condemned." Actions followed their disbelief. They rejected God and murdered his prophet:

54 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

In contrast to the disbelief and murder of the maddening crowd, Stephen manifest his Christ-like spirit to the very end of his life: "While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep." Stephen saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, thus forever refuting those who look for some future, fuller glory for Christ. Christ had fulfilled the law and the prophets, and Stephen saw that it was so.

The scriptures are silent as to whether or not any of these ever did obey the Lord, except for Saul. The statement, "The witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul." implies that Saul was a ringleader. His authority in the matter is clear in Acts 8:1: "And Saul was there, giving approval to his death." Yet this young man later saw his error and obeyed

the gospel, becoming an apostle of the Lord, and writing most of the letters in the New Testament. It is never too late to obey the gospel of the Lord.

Conclusion

The Jewish history was one of rejecting God, worshipping idols, and killing the prophets, in whom Christ was then speaking. Now, they continue in their ways refusing to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized, as the Lord now commands; plus they stoned the prophet of Christ, Stephen, who fulfilled the great commission by preaching the gospel to them. By not repenting and turning again, they forfeit the forgiveness of sins, the presence of the Lord, and salvation. In contrast, they carry the guilt of their sins; even murder (Revelation 21:8).

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. How had the Jews historically dealt with God's prophets? _____
2. What are some modern day examples parallel to the Jews worshipping idols? _____

3. Who and what was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies? _____
4. Where does God dwell? _____
5. What was Saul's role in the stoning of Stephen? _____
6. Describe Stephen's attitude toward his murderers. _____
Where did he see Jesus? _____

6. Conversion of the Samaritans—Acts 8

Acts 8:4-25 follows the sermon of Stephen and his stoning in Acts 7. This narrative describes the details attendant to the conversion of the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people in the Northern Kingdom who had intermarried after the priests, the wealthy, and the noble were carried away into captivity. Great animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. However, Christ forecast his acceptance of Samaritans in John 4 when he promised the Samaritan woman living water. The Samaritans in her village called him the “Savior of the world” in John 4:42. Jesus confirmed his acceptance of Samaritans in his parable called the *Good Samaritan* in Luke 10:33. The Samaritans claim to have the oldest manuscript of the Pentateuch (*The Nablus Roll*), which uses a script and language much older than the oldest Jewish manuscripts. The Samaritans claim that the Pentateuch was the only inspired scripture.

The Gospel Is Preached to the Samaritans

4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.

The scattered Christians fulfilled the Great Commission by preaching the word and proclaiming Christ. Philip’s preaching to the Samaritans further defines the all-inclusive nature of the term *all nations*. The gospel has gone to Jews from all over the world (Acts 2) and to the poor and lame (Acts 3) and now to the Samaritans, a racial group despised by the Jews.

Signs and Miracles Accompanied Them

6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.

Mark’s account of the Great Commission told of signs that would accompany those who believe. Lesson 5 illustrated how these signs were to confirm the word (Hebrews 2:1-4). Like the healing of the crippled beggar in Acts 3, these miracles are obvious, apparent, and without doubt in their manifestation.

9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

Simon, who practiced sorcery, becomes central to this conversion. The Samaritans held him in awe and esteem, saying that he was the divine power known as the Great Power. Simon, like teachers of today, could amaze them with his magic. All people must be aware of the possibilities of danger in allowing their amazement to lead them to follow a false teacher. Paul taught in 2 Thess 2:9-12:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Simon is an excellent representation of this work of evil and the power that it had over the Samaritans.

The Samaritans Believed the Gospel and Were Baptized

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

In Mark's account, the Lord has said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Here the Samaritans, including Simon, believed and were baptized. Philip preached the gospel, which here includes the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Millennialists claim that Jesus failed to establish his kingdom. They cannot explain why, if Jesus failed in establishing his kingdom, Philip preached the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is good news because God brought converts into the kingdom according to Colossians 1:12-14, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and **brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves**, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." John, among others, confirmed this teaching in Rev 1:5b-6a: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" God made us this kingdom, and it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Speaking in the present tense, the Hebrew writer said in Heb 12:28-29: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" The gospel Philip preached included a kingdom, present and continuing, that cannot be shaken. God brings those who believe and are baptized into this kingdom of the Son he loves. This agrees perfectly with what happened to the converts on the Day of Pentecost: "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:47.

The Manner in Which the Signs Follow the Believers Is Illustrated

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The phrase *accepted the word of God* illuminates the all-inclusive nature of obedience from faith to repentance, confession, and baptism. Salvation results from this process, but the ability to perform signs does not (see notes on *gift of the Holy Spirit* in Lesson 3). To enable the Samaritans to receive that measure of the Holy Spirit that permitted the doing of signs and miracles, the apostles had to place hands on them. Simon was absolutely certain that the laying on of the hands of apostle imparted the spiritual gifts.

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon was so certain of where this power existed, he tried to buy the ability. This apostolic example should forever put to rest the idea that people today can perform signs and miracles. Where are the apostles—men who had been with the Lord from the beginning (Acts 1:22-23)?

If no apostles, no laying on of the apostles' hands, no spiritual gifts. Paul also prophesied that these gifts would cease in 1 Cor 13.

Peter's Remedy for Simon's Great Sin Holds True Today

20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Peter's remedy for Simon's great sin—thinking to buy the gift of God with money—holds true today. Simon's sin was so bad that Peter said that his heart was not right, and his act was described as wickedness. Peter said that Simon was full of bitterness and captive to sin. However, no matter how great the sin, there is still hope for the Christian. The inner act is repentance; and the outer act is to pray for forgiveness. John writes the very same in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Conclusion

This example is a perfect mirror of the Great Commission as recorded by Mark. They preached the gospel and extended its influence to yet another nation of people. The people, when they heard, believed and were baptized. Philip defined the nature of the kingdom and the influence of the Holy Spirit. Simon illustrated the remedy for sin among those who are already Christians. The example concludes: "24 Then Simon answered, 'Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.'"

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. In what way is the Kingdom of God good news? _____
2. What did the Samaritans do when they heard the gospel? _____
3. What is the purpose of signs and miracles? _____
4. What prompted Simon to sin? _____
5. What could the apostles do that Philip could not do? _____
6. What was the remedy for Simon's sin? _____

7 Conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch—Acts 8

The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch follows Luke's account of the conversion of the Samaritans in the first part of Acts 8. Luke records this conversion in Acts 8:26-40. This conversion, just as the previous ones, follows the instructions of the Lord when he gave the Great Commission. This episode begins with an angel of the Lord instructing Philip:

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

The Ethiopian Adds a Racial, Political, and Sexual Dimension to "All Nations"

27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

The Ethiopian eunuch brings three new dimensions to the meaning of *all nations* as it appeared in the Great Commission—racial, political, and sexual. *All nations* includes people of all races and nations. The Ethiopian was from a country south of Egypt and was most probably a black African. God did not discriminate against people because of race. The importance of this happening becomes clear to Peter, who said in Acts 10:34-35, "Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.'" Hopefully, the church in our day has learned this lesson in regard to African Americans. Let us hope and pray that we will take the gospel with zeal to new people coming to live among us: Hispanic, Indians, Orientals, etc.

The eunuch illustrates that the gospel is to go to people of differing political persuasions. Since he was an important official in charge of the entire Queen's treasury, he probably believed that monarchies were a sufficient form of government. Believing in a democratic form of government is not a requirement for salvation. Christians are to accept the rule of those whom God appoints. In Rom 13:1-2, Paul instructed us, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."

The eunuch illustrates that the gospel is to go to all people regardless of sex or sexual orientation, even those who have no sexual inclination at all. In other words, sex is nothing when it comes to the great commission. Jesus put discipleship and sex in the proper perspective in Matt 19:10-12, when he forbade people divorced to remarry, except that divorce was for adultery:

The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." 11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

The contemporary issue of popularizing and approving of homosexuality as a life style confronts the church. Yes, the gospel is to go to people with unclear sexual orientation, but these must also be taught that as Christians they must forego illicit sexual conduct (Rom 1:26-

27; 1 Cor 6:9:10), even if they must renounce their life style for the kingdom of God." The same is true for those divorced for reasons other than adultery.

The Ethiopian Illustrates the Necessity of Preaching

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

33 *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.*

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

The example of the Ethiopian illustrated how necessary it is to have preachers. The Eunuch could not himself have found the way from Isaiah to Christ. Philip's opening is one that is useful today. We might say, "Do you understand what the Bible is saying?" The Ethiopian's answer, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me." reflects exactly what Paul taught, in Rom 10:12-15, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?" Preaching is the essential command to believers.

The Gospel Includes the Good News about Jesus

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Peter told him the good news about Jesus. Older versions say that he preached Jesus. The good news is the death, burial, resurrection, and the appearance of Jesus after his death (Acts 2; 1 Cor 15:1-4). In Acts 8:12, Philip preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Peter had also taught in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The Ethiopian Understood That Jesus Required Him to Be Baptized

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Jesus had told them that he that believes and is baptized would be saved. Now the Ethiopian says directly, "Why shouldn't I be baptized?" The evidence that we must be baptized to be saved is overwhelming, yet many insist that it is not necessary. Peter said that we must repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38. Ananias told Paul in Acts 22:16: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." Paul wrote in Rom 6:4, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we

too may live a new life." Peter added, emphatically, "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also." 1 Peter 3:20-21.

The Baptism Was an Immersion—a Burial

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away,

Prior to this baptism, a verse 37 appears in older versions showing the Ethiopian making the good confession: "And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" The necessity of the good confession is apparent in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles. In Matt 10:32, Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven." Paul taught in Rom 10:10, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

In this example, the mode of baptism is equally clear as an immersion: 1. Both men went down into the water; 2. Philip baptized him; and 3. they came up out of the water. Since the word *baptism* means immersion, the practice is firmly set by the word of God.

Conclusion

And the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

The Ethiopian rejoiced after he obeyed the gospel. He had accomplished what the Lord had commanded. He obeyed the gospel preached by being buried with Christ in baptism. He was now a disciple of the Lord, he was saved, and his sins were forgiven. No greater reasons exist than these to prompt rejoicing.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. How did Philip find the Ethiopian? _____
2. What was the Ethiopian reading? _____ What does this show about him? _____
3. What did Philip preach? _____
4. What did the Ethiopian say when he heard the gospel? _____
5. Why did the eunuch rejoice? _____

8. The Conversion of Saul—Acts 9:1-25

The study of the fulfillment of the Great Commission of the Lord comes to the conversion of Saul in Acts 9:1-25. Previous lessons have studied how the gospel went to Jews of all nations, to the crippled and poor, to people of all nationalities, and to people of different races and political persuasions. Now the gospel goes to Saul of Tarsus—perhaps the greatest enemy that the early church had known up until this time. This study has met Saul twice earlier. In Acts 7, he was at the stoning of Stephen where “the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” Acts 7:58. Acts 8:1 describes Saul’s complicity in Stephen’s death, “And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.” Acts 8:3 tells the depth of his involvement in the persecution of the church: “But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”

All Nations Includes Those Who Have Done the Very Worst Deeds

9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

When the Lord said to preach the gospel to all nations, this included those that had done the very worst deeds. It is difficult to imagine how one could have been worse than Saul. He consented to the murder of Stephen, laid waste the church, and, now, breathes murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples, binding them and taking them as prisoners. Today, the gospel is still to go to those who are wicked and opposed to the church. The religious leaders of the world should not be excluded from efforts to preach the gospel, nor should murderers and killers. The gospel was to go to all nations.

The Lord Appeared to Saul

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The Lord appeared directly to Saul, speaking to him. This was truly a great miracle—light flashed and the Lord spoke. Yet, Saul was not saved at the point of this great miracle. Miracles do not save. He still had to hear and obey the gospel to be saved, just as the Lord had commanded in the great commission. The Lord said, “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” In Paul’s account of his conversion that he made before the people in Acts 22, he included a question that he asked the Lord: ““What shall I do, Lord?” I asked. ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’” Saul asked the



same question asked by those Jews on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37: "Brothers, what shall we do?" Saul, just as they did, wanted to know what to do.

The Gospel Must Be Preached by Men

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

11 The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. 12 In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

13 "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

The miracle was clear, evident, and apparent to all. The men traveling with Saul saw his condition and heard the sound, but did not see anyone. Saul remained in this condition waiting for Ananias to come to him. In the meantime, Ananias had his own vision and the Lord instructed to go to Saul on Straight Street. As with the other example of conversion, the gospel had to be preached to Saul.

When Saul Heard the Gospel, He Was Baptized

17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Ananias did as the Lord instructed and went to Saul. Ananias said that his mission was two fold: that Saul might see again and that Saul might be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is clear from verse 12 that Ananias placed his hands on him to restore his sight. Once this happened and he could see again 'he got up and was baptized.'" This sequence is made even more emphatic in Acts 22 when Paul told his story to the people:

2 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

He first received his sight, and then was told, "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name."¹ According to Acts 2:38, it would be with the baptism and washing away

of his sins that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit: "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

Conclusion

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

In the end, Saul of Tarsus had his sins forgiven and became a fervent disciple of the Lord, just as commanded in the Great Commission. He later was called Paul beginning in Acts 13:9 Even those who murder Christians and persecute the church are proper subjects who must hear and obey the gospel, receiving the Lord's salvation. Two purposes were served by the Lord's appearing to Saul. He was convicted and convinced of what he must do and he qualified to serve the Lord as his apostle. 1 Cor 15:8-9 records the rest of the story: "And last of all he appeared to me also. . . . 9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Describe Saul's treatment of Christians. _____
2. How did Saul receive his sight? _____
3. What did Ananias tell Saul to do to wash away his sins? _____
4. What two purposes were served by the Lord's appearing to Saul? _____
5. How did Saul receive the Holy Spirit? _____

9. Conversion of Cornelius—Acts 10 & 11

This study of the fulfillment of the Great Commission now comes to the conversion of Cornelius—a Roman centurion. With the study, the *all nations* provision of the Great Commission takes a turn to include all the Gentiles. The word itself means *the nations* and comes from the Greek word *ethos*, from which we get our word *ethnic*. After showing that the gospel is to go to Jews of all nations, the poor and crippled, the Samaritans, and ranking officials and men of other races, Luke now turns to the event that heralded the opening of the gospel to absolutely everyone in the world. The events here recorded are truly historical in shaping the world-wide scope of the gospel call.

The Gospel Went to a Soldier Who Was Devout, God-fearing, and Charitable

Acts 10:1-4

10:1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

Cornelius was a centurion in the Roman army, showing that the gospel should go to military people. His place leading the Italian regiment shows him to be an Italian soldier from close to Rome. Can a person (military or law enforcement) charged to kill by the ruler be a Christian? No evidence suggests that either Cornelius or the Philippian jailor in Acts 16 gave up their jobs in order to obey the gospel. Concerning governing authorities, Paul wrote in Rom 13:4-5, "For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." The question of whether a Christian can bear arms becomes a question for the individual, to be settled by the individual in the context and meaning of Rom 14:23: "But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin." The gospel in this passage went to a practicing military officer of the Gentiles.



That Cornelius was a good moral man did not save him. He was devout, God-fearing, generous to those in need, and prayed regularly. There was nothing morally wrong with Cornelius, yet he had to hear and obey the gospel to be saved. Those who hide behind the cloak of morality and professed goodness should understand that they still must obey the gospel. Even Christ, himself, had to obey God in order to fulfill all righteousness (Matt 3:15). The Great Commission requires that the gospel go to the good moral people of the world and

that they believe, repent, and be baptized.

Cornelius' question upon seeing the angel of God was similar to the question of other converts in showing his openness to do the Lord's will. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

Acts 10:4-8: The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Cornelius followed up by doing exactly what the angel told him to do.

Peter's Vision Instructs Him that God Has Created Nothing Unclean

Acts 10:9-18: About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

The central lesson taught to Peter is the expression: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This vision shows Peter that the Gentiles are not unclean. The episode marks the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The ceremonial Law of Moses gives way to the Gospel call of the New Testament.

The Visions Are Told with Emphasis on Hearing the Commands of the Lord

Acts 10:19-33: While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

27 Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without

raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

30 Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me 31 and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

When Peter asked why the men had come, he was told so that he (Cornelius) could hear what you have to say. Two miracles have occurred, but salvation depends on what Peter has to say. In verse 3, Cornelius puts what Peter is to say into the form of commandments of the Lord. When Peter told this story in Acts 11:13-14, he said that the message would save them: "He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. 14 He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'"

Peter Preaches the Gospel

Acts 10:34-43: *Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

39 *"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his cohorts exactly summarizes the Great Commission and reflects what the Lord wants all men to know. The *all nations* phrase of the Great Commission is here stated: "God accepts men from all nations." The good news of the gospel is peace through Jesus Christ who was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. The Jews who killed Christ rejected the peace of Christ and his power. God raised him up from the dead and caused him to be seen. Christ commanded the apostles to preach. Paul preached that everyone who believes in Christ would receive the forgiveness of sins in his name.

The Holy Spirit Came upon the Gentiles

Acts 10:44-46: *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.*

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles was identical to what had happened to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 11:15-17, Peter reiterated his story, telling that this was the baptism of the Holy Spirit: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he

had come on us at the beginning. 16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" It is clear Cornelius and his gentile cohorts received exactly the same measure of the Holy Spirit as the apostles. These are the only two occasions where this measure of the Spirit is given. Two visions occurred and this demonstration of the Spirit, yet Cornelius and his house were not saved.

Cornelius and His House Believed, Repented, and Were Baptized

Acts 10:46-48: Then Peter said, 47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

The demonstration of the Spirit did not save these people. However, it did show that the Gentiles were to receive the gospel. They still had to be baptized. In fact, Peter ordered that they be baptized, showing that baptism is essential to salvation, and not just an option. Peter had preached that everyone who believed on Christ would have the forgiveness of sins. All those present recognized the necessity for repentance. Acts 11:18 said, "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

Conclusion

The conversion of Cornelius expands the scope of the gospel to the Gentiles, proving that God is no respecter of persons. This conversion illustrates all the elements of the Great Commission: going to all nations, preaching the gospel of the death, burial, resurrection, and being seen, plus believers who repent and are baptized for the forgiveness of sins and who receive the salvation of life eternal.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. What were the elements that describe Cornelius' moral nature? _____
2. What was the purpose of Cornelius' vision? _____
3. What was the purpose of Peter's vision? _____
4. What was the purpose of the speaking in tongues? _____
5. What did it take for Cornelius and his house to have forgiveness of sins? _____
6. What did Peter order them to do? _____

10. Conversions of Lydia and the Philippian Jailor—Acts 16

Acts 16 accounts the events preceding and including the conversion of the house of Lydia and the Philippian jailor: The first five verses of the chapter cover the selecting of Timothy as a traveling companion and describes their travels from town to town. From this effort, “the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” Acts 16:5. In verses 6-10, Luke records what some call the Macedonian Call:

7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.



From Troas they sailed for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. From there they traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia.

The Conversion of Lydia Takes the Gospel to a Business Woman

Acts 16:13-15: 13 *On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.* 14 *One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.* 15 *When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*

Upon arriving in the city of Philippi, Paul and his companions went to where they expected to find a place of prayer, and therefore, religious people. One of the women was Lydia, a business woman who dealt in purple cloth. The *all nations* element of the Great Commission extends by example to include business people and women. Verse 14 describes Lydia as a “worshiper of God.” In this regard, she is not unlike Cornelius, of whom Acts 10:2 says, “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” Verse 14 further describes Lydia, saying, “The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.” Even though the Lord opened her heart, she still had to respond to the message (the gospel). While it is clear from all the examples of conversion that salvation requires the gospel and one’s obedience, the Lord often has a role in opening the

heart of an individual. Jesus taught that God is available to help those of a true spirit and mind in Matt 7:7-8: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Lydia and members of her household responded to the gospel message by being baptized. It was after obeying the message that she phrased the statement, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house. This passage teaches with certainty that true believers are those who obey the gospel by being baptized. This is how the Great Commission stated it in Matt 28:19, "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." When modern teachers teach that people are saved by faith only and without baptism, they fail to understand that the belief that Jesus and the apostles taught is all inclusive of all the commands of the Lord in the Great Commission. In this way they misled their followers. James confirmed this teaching of Acts in James 2:20-24:

20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

Paul and Silas Are Severely Flogged and Thrown in Jail

Acts 16:16-23: Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

The events of these paragraphs describe how Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail because of the miracle that Paul did—casting out the demon that allowed the girl to foretell the future. The owners of this slave girl caused the crowd, who were Romans, to attack Paul and Silas, and caused the magistrates to order them beaten and imprisoned. The jailer put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet with stocks. The importance of these events is to lead to the miracle of their escape and the conversion of the jailer in the next few verses. However, one must note that what the slave girl shouted is an exact truth of gospel conversion. She said, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." Acts 16:17. Emphatically, there is a **way** to be saved, and not just any way to be saved, as taught by many teachers today. The jailer learns this exact **way** to be saved from Paul and Silas

The Jailer Asked, "What Must I Do to Be Saved?"

Acts 16:25-29: *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Upon the earthquake and the freeing of the prisoners, the jailer was provoked even to the taking of his own life, since Roman law would have required the death sentence for allowing prisoners to escape. Paul stopped him by presenting himself and Silas. The jailer's first and immediate response was, "What must I do to be saved?" He undoubtedly knew that the jailing of Paul and Silas was the result of the slave crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." The apostles, with Peter leading, faced this question in Acts 2:37-39, when after the sermon, the listeners were cut to the heart and said, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter told them: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Paul himself had asked a similar question in Acts 22:10. "What shall I do, Lord?" he asked. He was told, in Acts 22:16, to do just what those on the day of Pentecost had done, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." The rest of the jailer's conversion story tells exactly what one must do to be saved, confirming the absolute necessity of faith and baptism in conversion. Men can only fulfill the Great Commission in this way.

Paul and Silas Teach the Jailer the Way to Be Saved

Acts 16:31-34: *They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole family.*

In answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas issued an all-inclusive statement in reply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." The Lord himself had said in the Great Commission in Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." In keeping with the Great Commission, they spoke the word of the Lord to him and his entire house. Paul and Silas preached the gospel. In that very hour of the night, they dressed the wounds of Paul and Silas (a penitent act), and the jailer and all his family were immediately baptized. Joy filled the jailer because he had come to believe in God. This example defines the all-encompassing nature of true faith. As with Lydia, so with the jailer, belief was complete after obedience. The past perfect verb, *had come*, expresses a state of being begun in the past with instruction and obedience. The present infinitive, *to believe*, extends the state of being into the indefinite future. A believing person will always be a taught, obedient person, and never one like the devils who believe and tremble, but never obey and follow.

The all-encompassing faith is evident in all the translations. Acts 16:34 in the New King James and the New American Standard versions read, "Having believed in God." The use here of the present perfect tense verb, *having believed*, indicates an action begun in the past and

extended to the present, and beyond to an indefinite time in the future. Therefore, true faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God as Paul taught in Rom 10:8-10. However, one who believes obeys:

"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Conclusion

Lydia and her household and the jailer and all his family fulfilled their faith by their obedient acts of belief in God and His word. The rest of the story follows:

Acts 16:35-40: 35 *When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: "Release those men." 36 The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace."*

37 *But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."*

38 *The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. 39 They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. 40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.*

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Why did Paul and his companions go to Macedonia? _____
2. What were Lydia and the women doing at the river side? _____
3. What was necessary for Lydia to do to be considered a believer in the Lord? _____

4. What kind of faith is dead faith? _____
5. What were Paul and Silas doing while they were waiting in prison? _____
6. What question did the jailer ask? _____
7. In what way is faith all-encompassing? _____
8. Why were Lydia and her household and the jailer and all his family baptized? _____

11. Conversion of the Athenians—Acts 17

The first 15 verses of Acts 17 records the travels of Paul and his companions from Philippi to Athens. Paul spoke of this time in Phil 4:14-16: "Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need." Acts 17:3 illustrates how Paul preached the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus. After a mob threatened Paul and Silas, the brothers sent them to Berea (Acts 17:5-10). History has recognized the Bereans for Luke's praise in Luke 17:11, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Agitation by the Jews from Thessalonica resulted in Paul's going to Athens, where the events unfold surrounding one of Paul's most famous sermons.



Paul Immediately Preached the Good News about Jesus and the Resurrection

Acts 17:16-21 *While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)*

Athens, a city full of idols, distressed Paul. Paul reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue but also took the gospel to the people in the marketplace. Here, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers challenged Paul who was fulfilling the Great Commission by preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection to all men.

The Epicureans. The Epicureans followed the philosophy of Epicurus who was born on the island of Samos in 341 BC, and who taught first in Asia Minor and afterward in Athens till his death in 270 BC. The philosophy spread widely in Asia Minor. (Notes from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.)

Epicurus taught:

"The aim and end of life for every man is his own happiness, and happiness is primarily defined as pleasure. Wherefore we call pleasure the Alpha and Omega of a blessed life. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of

every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge every good thing'" (Epicurus, Letter to Menoecus from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc.).

Epicurus used the phrases *alpha and omega* and *blessed life* to describe his pleasure-dominated philosophy. His birth off the coast of Asia Minor on Samos and the spread of his popular, hedonistic philosophy across the region, give great meaning to these phrases as used by Lord God, the Almighty, and Christ the Lord in the Revelation. In Rev 1:8, God said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." An Epicurean audience would know immediately that God was attacking their hedonistic philosophy directly. Blessedness is not in pleasure; it is in the Lord God, the almighty. God repeated the same strong teaching in Rev 21:6-8 at the completion of his revelation:

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God sets the inheritance of the faithful against the tragic second death of pleasure-seekers of every kind. In Rev 22:13-15, Jesus takes the *alpha and omega* characteristic unto himself, promising the tree of life and entrance through the heavenly city to the truly *blessed*. The evil and pleasure-seekers remain outside:

13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

The Revelation also makes clear the truly blessed are not the pleasure-seekers but those who follow the Lord:

- 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Rev 1:3.
- 13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." Rev 14:13
- 15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Rev 16:15
- 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Rev 19:9
- 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Rev 20:5-6
- 7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Rev 22:7

In the 21st century, efforts to make worship the feel-good province of the praise worshipers

have echoes of the problems confronted by the churches of Asia Minor and Greece. Truth comes only from God and those who worship him must worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). It is not the feelings of the worshiper that counts but the pleasure of God.

The Stoics. The name, Stoic, was derived from the Stoa Poikile, the painted porch at Athens, where the founders of the school first lectured. This school of Greek philosophy was founded at Athens circa 294 BC by Zeno (circa 336 BC - 264 BC), a native of Citium, a Greek colony in Cyprus. But the Semitic race predominated in Cyprus, and it has been conjectured that Zeno was of Semitic rather than Hellenic origin. This would have given him close ties to the religions of the Samaritans and Hebrews, both of which looked to the almighty God of the five books of Moses. It is from this background that Paul refers to an unknown god in Acts 16:23. Zeno's Greek critics taunted him with being a Phoenician. It has, therefore, been suggested that the distinctive moral tone of the system was Semitic and not Hellenic. Centers, among others, were Tarsus and Sidon. Paul, who was formerly Saul of Tarsus, would have been fully informed of the Stoic precepts. In the 2nd century B.C. the doctrine was brought to Rome where it spread widely among the upper classes of Roman society. The system acquired its most lasting influence by its adoption as the formative factor in the jurisprudence of imperial Rome, and Roman law in its turn contributed to the formation of Roman Catholic doctrine and ethics. The main principles of Stoicism may be summarized:

- Adherents follow nature.
- The law of Nature is reason (logos)--the principle of intelligence in man, and the divine reason imminent in the world.
- Their metaphysics inclined to be a materialistic pantheism. On the one side, Nature is the organization of material atoms by the operation of its own uniform and necessary laws. On the other side, it is a living, rational being, subduing all its parts to work out a rational purpose inherent in the whole. As such, it may be called Providence or God.

[These notes on the Stoics are in part from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.]

Paul Addresses the Philosophers

Acts 17:22-23: *22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.*

The Areopagus jutted out from the Acropolis. It was here that five centuries earlier, Socrates had faced his accusers. The very substance and tone of Paul's address sides him with the Stoics who held a concept of one God, however, a pantheistic (i.e. god extends throughout creation) one. Paul declares that he is going to make the unknown God known to them.

Acts 17:24-28: *24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28' For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'*

Paul is not talking to Jews and God-fearing Greeks as in Acts 17:17. He is talking to Greek

philosophers. The beginning of his persuasion is not to start with Christ raised from the dead, but with God, the creator of all things. He concludes his sermon with Christ whom God raised from the dead. The God Paul preached was neither pantheistic nor polytheistic. This God made everything; man makes nothing; and certainly not gods, made with hands and temples where they live. The origin and purpose of man, according to Paul, was to receive life and breath and everything else from God. This is the same teaching as that of Genesis Gen 2:7: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." The duty of man is to reach out for God for in him we live, move, and have our being. Therefore, the true religion comes from God and not from the mind of man or from man figuring out God. This difference continues today, even though many believe that the religion of God and Christ comes by development through their own minds—individually and collectively. When religious groups speak today from a prophet, pope, priest, king, synod, presbytery, assembly, council, or convention, they do not speak from God. These ancient and modern rationalists are described accurately by Paul in 1 Cor 1:20-25:

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Paul Closes with the Gospel of the Resurrection and the Command to Repent

Acts 17:29-31: 29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Man is the offspring of God; and, therefore, the divine being cannot be an image made by man. In what way did God overlook such ignorance?

Paul writes in Rom 2:14-15,

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, 15 since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

The universality of the *all men* of the Great Commission is the same as *all people, everywhere*. The entire phrase, including the command to repent is the same as the Lord's command in Luke 24:47-48, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The idea indicting both the Epicureans and Stoics is that God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. The entire purpose of man is not flesh and pleasure (Epicureans) or mind and reason (Stoics), but it is to repent and obey the Father. He will judge all by that obedience. The proof of Paul's position is that God raised his son from the dead. That the flesh dies and with it the mind, but the spirit lives on offends Stoics

and Epicureans alike. Modern religionists, who must find out that their own thoughtout constructs of religion are of no profit, will respond as the philosophers of Athens responded.

Conclusion

Acts 17:32-34: 32 *When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."* 33 *At that, Paul left the Council.* 34 *A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

The resurrection of the dead was the binding point. Without a Christ, there can be no resurrection of the dead. No amount of earthly pleasure or wisdom can offer eternal life. In spite of the response of those that sneered, "A few men became followers of Paul and believed." The Lord had said in Matthew's account of the great commission to make disciples. Here, Luke calls them followers. In Mark's account, the Lord had said that the one who believes and is baptized shall be saved. Here the followers believed. Paul and the followers had fulfilled the commands of the Great Commission.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Where was the Areopagus? _____
2. For what was it used? _____
3. Who were the Stoics? _____
4. Who were the Epicureans? _____
5. Why did the Stoics have more in common with Paul's teaching? _____
6. Why can idols not be God's? _____
7. What does God command of all people, everywhere? _____
8. What will happen on God's set day of Judgment? _____
9. Who was raised from the dead? _____
10. Who will be judged? _____
11. What proof did God give all men? _____

12. Conversions of Apollos and Those at Ephesus—Acts 18, 19

The latter part of Acts 18 and the early part of Acts 19 describe the conversion of Apollos and 12 men at Ephesus. Paul had met and worked at tent making with Priscilla and Aquila in the early part of Acts 18. Paul sailed for Syria, leaving Priscilla and Aquila behind at Ephesus where they met Apollos. After going to Antioch, Paul took the interior road back to Ephesus. Both of these episodes of conversion occur in Ephesus, but at different times.

Apollos and the twelve men in Ephesus had in common that they all knew only the baptism of John. These examples of conversion illustrate that only the one baptism will do. Indeed, Ephesians 4:5 teaches emphatically that there is one baptism, just as there is one God and one Lord. Men are not free to design their own manner or purpose of baptism, as is the common modern practice.



The Gospel Goes to Apollos—A Scholar and Powerful Preacher

Acts 18:24-28: 24 *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*

27 *When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. 28 For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*

Apollos was a Jew from Alexandria who by name was a Greek, and thus a Hellenistic Jew. That he was a learned man was typical of those from Alexandria, the seat of Hellenistic, Jewish scholarship—the most famous product of which was the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament. This Greek version of the Old Testament is a version of a Hebrew text that precedes by about 1,000 years the earliest dated Hebrew manuscript (916 AD). The Septuagint was the Bible of most writers of the New Testament. Not only are the majority of their citations from Scripture borrowed from it, but their writings contain numerous reminiscences of its language. Its words were household words to them. Alexandria itself was a cosmopolitan city located on the Nile Delta [Some notes are taken from the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.]

Although Apollos had received instruction in the way of the Lord, and although he was an eloquent speaker, something was missing. In main, his teaching about Jesus was accurate, but again, there was something missing. The scriptures say that he knew only the baptism of John. The example of Apollos and the example of the Ephesians show forever that the kind of baptism one has and teaches is important to the very salvation of the soul. Why else would

Priscilla and Aquila take him aside and explain to him the way of God more adequately. These same inadequacies in John's baptism are true of many baptisms today.

Twelve Men of Ephesus Know Only the Baptism of John

Acts 19:1-7: *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"*

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all.

The twelve men of Ephesus in this passage knew only the baptism of John. Here, Paul teaches emphatically that the baptism of John was of repentance. Furthermore, John had taught Jesus was the one on whom they should believe. Upon hearing the word from Paul, they responded immediately, being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. From baptism they received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Paul conferred the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues on these penitent, baptized, believers by the laying on of his hands (See the Samaritans of Acts 8 and 1 Cor 12).

How the Baptism of John Differs from the Baptism of Jesus

John's baptism was not in the name of the Lord. In Paul taught in Acts 19:4-5. *"John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.* The true baptism will be in the name of Jesus. In Matt 28:19-20, Jesus required baptism in the name of Godhead, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* According to Paul in Col 2:9-12, Christ is the fullness of the Godhead (Deity): *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. . . . 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."* The Lord had not yet commanded his baptism when John was baptizing.

John's baptism did not provide for the forgiveness of sins. As Paul stated, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. It looked forward to the remission of sins in Christ and in his blood, but could supply neither. Peter attested to the necessity of one's being in Christ to be saved, when he said in Acts 4:12, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, he connected his blood forever to the forgiveness of sins. In Matt 26:28-29, he said, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* The Hebrew writer reinforced this connection in Heb 9:22: *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."* Only by the baptism into Christ and into his blood can one be the recipient of the redeeming power of Christ's death and blood. Christ's baptism and not John's

baptism provides the “putting off of the body of sin.” Paul wrote in Rom 6:3-7

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

The baptism of John was never a baptism into the body of Christ, the church. In Matt 14:10, Matthew records the account of the beheading of John. In Matt 16:18, Jesus the Lord, said, “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” John the Baptist could not have established the church since he was long dead when the Lord said that he would build it. Any church that claims to be the Baptist church cannot be the church that Jesus built. When Jesus did build his church beginning in Acts 2:40-41, baptized believers were added to the church: “With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” The Lord added to this church these saved people in Acts 2:47: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Paul confirms this teaching in 1 Cor 12:13, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” The one body into which true believers are baptized is the church according to Eph 1:21-23: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

Conclusion

In this lesson, Apollos and the twelve men of Ephesus illustrate emphatically that the kind of baptism people have is the difference in being saved or lost. Otherwise, why were they taught about the true baptism and why did they quickly obey the teaching about the new baptism. For baptism to be the true baptism, it must be “in the name of the Lord” and not in the name of any other including John the Baptist. The baptism must be for the forgiveness of sins as one is buried with Christ in the likeness of his death and raised to walk in newness of life, putting off the old body of sin. True baptism baptizes one in the body of Christ, the church of Christ, where Christ himself is the savior of the body. Eph 5:23-33 teaches:

Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. . . . Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Describe Apollos as the man we first meet. _____
2. What was missing in his religion? _____
3. What did Pricilla and Aquila do about Apollos’ condition? _____
4. What should we do today when we met those inappropriately baptized? _____
5. What was missing in the conversion of the 12 men at Ephesus? _____
6. How did they respond to Paul’s teaching? _____

13. Non-Conversions of Elymas, Felix, and Agrippa—Acts 13, 24, 26

This lesson addresses three examples of people who heard the gospel but failed to obey it. These examples of non-conversion in Acts are the last lesson of this series called *The Great Commission and the Conversions in Acts*. In the previous lessons, we saw the gospel fall on good and honest hearts, and the people who heard the gospel believed the gospel and obeyed the gospel. What happened when the gospel message fell on hard hearts? This lesson explores three examples of people who were not converted: a sorcerer in Acts 13; Felix, a governor in Acts 24; and Agrippa, a king, in Acts 26.



Elymas, A child of the Devil, Rejects the Gospel

In Acts 13:1-12 the church at Antioch, following the instruction of the Holy Spirit, sent Paul and Barnabas on what was to become known as Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). Paul and Barnabas went down to Seleucia and sailed for Cyprus, arriving at Salamis. In what was to become a custom, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues; thus fulfilling the Lord's command in the Great Commission to preach the gospel (Acts 13:4-5). The scripture gives the following account of their experience:

Acts 13:6-12: 6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

This episode of conversions centers on two very different men. One Bar-Jesus, is a sorcerer and false prophet, also called Elymas. The other man was a proconsul, named Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man, who wanted to hear the word of God. Elymas opposed Paul and Barnabas and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Paul, speaking and full of the Holy Spirit, look straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?" Paul's language draws a straight line between the children of God and the children of the devil. A child of the devil is also an enemy of everything that is right. Jesus himself had used this same language to describe disobedient people, when in John 8:31-32, he spoke to Jews who were believers, "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Even though these Jews believed, they would not obey him. In John 8:42-44, Jesus uses clear language to call them children of the devil: "Why is my language not clear

to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him." In Gal 1:6-8, Paul tells us the penalty for perverting the truth:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

Why did not Elymas obey the gospel? He was the child of the devil, the enemy of everything that is right, full of deceit and trickery, and one who perverted the truth.

Felix Never Found a Convenient Time to Obey the Gospel

Acts 24:17-27 *"After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. 18 I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. 19 But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. 20 Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin – 21 unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"*

22 *Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. "When Lysias the commander comes," he said, "I will decide your case." 23 He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.*

24 *Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." 26 At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.*

27 *When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.*

In the context of this passage, Paul had made his defense to Felix, the Roman governor; and Felix, the governor, had adjourned his case, deferring it until the coming of Lysias. In the meantime, Felix who was well acquainted with the way, sent for Paul in order to listen to him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. Felix, therefore, understood the way of Christ clearly. Paul's discourse included righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Felix was afraid (some versions say terrified). Felix's response characterized procrastination as he said, "When I find it convenient, I will send for you." Many today are seeking a more convenient season to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus had confronted Jews who believed on him with the very same attitude as Felix. John recorded in John 12:42-43: "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God."

There is no indication in the scriptures that Felix ever found a convenient time to obey the gospel. Perhaps, he, as some of us, failed to recognize the urgency of obeying the gospel to save his eternal soul. Paul wrote in 2 Cor 6:2, "I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now

is the day of salvation.”

King Agrippa Was Never Persuaded to Obey the Gospel

Acts 26:19-30: 19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

25 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment."

The setting for this episode is Paul's defense before King Agrippa. Paul had rehearsed his conversion with the King in Acts 26:1-18. The above scripture comes after Paul's summary to Agrippa of how he presented the gospel. He starts by saying, "I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." Paul said that this was why the Jews seized him and added, "That the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." Porcius Festus had followed Felix as the governor of the province; and upon hearing what Paul told Agrippa, shouted, "You are out of your mind, Paul! "Your great learning is driving you insane." Paul turned immediately to Agrippa, saying that he knew Agrippa believed the prophets. Agrippa responded, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul answer that he wished that those who were listening would be like him. There is never a record of Agrippa's obeying the gospel. In fact, Agrippa often is described as one who was almost persuaded to become a Christian. The King James Version quotes Agrippa as saying in Acts 26:28, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

It is possible to be convinced that something is true and not act on it. Paul said, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." That Agrippa was convinced seems apparent. Yet he did not act. Many honest people know the truth and fail to act on it. Such seems to be the case with Agrippa.

How different is Agrippa from those in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost when those hearers were cut to the heart. Peter's persuasion on that day led thousands to obey the gospel: "With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three

thousand were added to their number that day.” Acts 2:40-41.

Conclusion

This 13-lesson study has shown the teaching of Christ when he gave the Great Commission. The numerous cases of conversion in the book of Acts show the apostles carrying out the commission exactly as the Lord commanded. The cases also show that good and honest people obey the word of the Lord accurately and in every regard. However, the three examples of non-conversion show the three reasons people, then and now, fail to respond. Some, like Elymas, are just too wicked and greedy to give their lives to Christ. Others, like Felix, are looking for a more convenient time; even the fear and terror of the judgment will not move them. Still others, like Agrippa, are seeking more and more persuasion, even though they already know what to do to be saved.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Compare the conversion of Elymas the sorcerer with that of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8).

2. Compare Felix’s conversion with that of Paul (Acts 22). _____

3. Compare the conversion of Agrippa with that of the hearers in Acts 2. _____
